

Montana Disaster and Emergency Services

NEWS RELEASE

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Vigilant Guard 2009 - HOPE Canine Teams to Train During Earthquake Exercise

Helena - Six certified therapy dog and handler teams from across the Rocky Mountain Region will be deploying to Helena September 15-17 as part of the Montana Volunteer Agencies Active in Disaster (MTVOAD) response to earthquake exercise Vigilant Guard 2009. HOPE Animal-Assisted Crisis Response provides comfort and encouragement through animal-assisted support to individuals affected by crises and disasters.

Members of HOPE have responded to all manner of crises, including major hurricanes, wildfires, train derailments, and school shootings. During the Vigilant Guard 2009 exercise, they will be providing comfort to evacuees at a Red Cross shelter, to simulated injured receiving treatment at the VA Hospital, and to first responders and disaster workers needing to relax and talk about their experiences.

"When tragedy strikes and we are unable to voice our frustration and pain, there is someone who uniquely cares," says Guy Youngblood, president of MTVOAD, referring to the HOPE teams.

Like search and rescue dogs, HOPE canines are taught to work and perform specific tasks during higher levels of stress and their handlers have received extensive training in crisis intervention and critical incident stress management.

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Media Note: The HOPE canines will be at the VA on September 15 and at the Red Cross Shelter (Salvation Army) on Thursday September 17th.